

# THE PREHISTORY AND BIRTH OF CHRIST

## PREEXISTENCE OF CHRIST

JN 1:1-18

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

<sup>5</sup> That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light. <sup>9</sup> The true light that gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

<sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup> He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.

<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. <sup>15</sup> (John testified concerning him and exclaimed, “This was the one of whom I said, “The one coming after me ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.’”) <sup>16</sup> Indeed, we have all received grace upon grace from his fullness, <sup>17</sup> for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father’s side—he has revealed him.

## THE GOSPEL

MK 1:1

LK 1:1-4

Morna Hooker has observed the importance of a story’s beginning and ending. In addition to creating intrigue at the beginning and “rounding things off” at the end, “each provides important clues about the meaning of the material that lies in between.”<sup>2</sup> The Gospels are no exception. Matthew’s genealogy (1:1-17) draws attention to the story behind the story of Jesus, namely God’s covenant relationship with Israel. John’s poetic prologue (1:1-18) captures the cosmic implications

of Jesus’s identity as the divine Word of God. The beginning of Mark has a more compressed style and is laden with OT overtones. Mark is signaling that what will follow in his account of “the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” is no less than the good news of God’s salvation foretold by the OT prophets. Luke explains that he has compiled a narrative based on eyewitness testimony, hoping that his reader Theophilus might “know the certainty of the things” concerning Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

<sup>1</sup> Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup> just as the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us. <sup>3</sup> It also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence, most honorable Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed.

<sup>2</sup> Morna D. Hooker, “Beginnings and Endings,” in *The Written Gospel* (eds. Markus Bockmuehl and Donald A. Hagner; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 184.

In short, every name on Matthew's genealogy opens up a story that stands behind his story of Jesus. On the broadest level, that storyline is marked by the high points of Israel's history starting with Abraham and climaxing with David's reign, before ending on the tragic note of exile. Israel's exile casts its shadow over the ensuing account of Jesus. Situated between his

account of Jesus's baptism and temptation, Luke's genealogy functions as a transition in the narrative. It is the author's emphasis on Jesus as the "beloved" (2:33), hereditary (3:38), and ultimately proven (4:3) Son of God that ties these narratives together. The latter is manifest in Satan's "If you are the Son of God."

<sup>1</sup> An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:

- <sup>2</sup> Abraham fathered Isaac,  
Isaac fathered Jacob,  
Jacob fathered Judah and his brothers,  
<sup>3</sup> Judah fathered Perez and Zerah by Tamar,  
Perez fathered Hezron,  
Hezron fathered Aram,  
<sup>4</sup> Aram fathered Amminadab,  
Amminadab fathered Nahshon,  
Nahshon fathered Salmon,  
<sup>5</sup> Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab,  
Boaz fathered Obed by Ruth,  
Obed fathered Jesse,  
<sup>6</sup> and Jesse fathered King David.  
David fathered Solomon by Uriah's wife,  
<sup>7</sup> Solomon fathered Rehoboam,  
Rehoboam fathered Abijah,  
Abijah fathered Asa,  
<sup>8</sup> Asa fathered Jehoshaphat,  
Jehoshaphat fathered Joram,  
Joram fathered Uzziah,  
<sup>9</sup> Uzziah fathered Jotham,  
Jotham fathered Ahaz,  
Ahaz fathered Hezekiah,  
<sup>10</sup> Hezekiah fathered Manasseh,  
Manasseh fathered Amon,  
Amon fathered Josiah,  
<sup>11</sup> and Josiah fathered Jeconiah and his brothers  
at the time of the exile to Babylon.  
<sup>12</sup> After the exile to Babylon  
Jeconiah fathered Shealtiel,  
Shealtiel fathered Zerubbabel,  
<sup>13</sup> Zerubbabel fathered Abiud,  
Abiud fathered Eliakim,  
Eliakim fathered Azor,  
<sup>14</sup> Azor fathered Zadok,  
Zadok fathered Achim,

<sup>23</sup> As he began his ministry, Jesus was about thirty years old and was thought to be the

- son of Joseph, son of Heli,  
<sup>24</sup> son of Matthat, son of Levi,  
son of Melchi, son of Jannai,  
son of Joseph, <sup>25</sup> son of Mattathias,  
son of Amos, son of Nahum,  
son of Esli, son of Naggai,  
<sup>26</sup> son of Maath, son of Mattathias,  
son of Semein, son of Josech,  
son of Joda, <sup>27</sup> son of Joanan,  
son of Rhesa, son of Zerubbabel,  
son of Shealtiel, son of Neri,  
<sup>28</sup> son of Melchi, son of Addi,  
son of Cosam, son of Elmadam,  
son of Er, <sup>29</sup> son of Joshua,  
son of Eliezer, son of Jorim,  
son of Matthat, son of Levi,  
<sup>30</sup> son of Simeon, son of Judah,  
son of Joseph, son of Jonam,  
son of Eliakim, <sup>31</sup> son of Melea,  
son of Menna, son of Mattatha,  
son of Nathan, son of David,  
<sup>32</sup> son of Jesse, son of Obed,  
son of Boaz, son of Salmon,  
son of Nahshon, <sup>33</sup> son of Amminadab,  
son of Ram, son of Hezron,  
son of Perez, son of Judah,  
<sup>34</sup> son of Jacob, son of Isaac,  
son of Abraham, son of Terah,  
son of Nahor, <sup>35</sup> son of Serug,  
son of Reu, son of Peleg,  
son of Eber, son of Shelah,  
<sup>36</sup> son of Cainan, son of Arphaxad,  
son of Shem, son of Noah,  
son of Lamech, <sup>37</sup> son of Methuselah,  
son of Enoch, son of Jared,  
son of Mahalalel, son of Cainan,

Achim fathered Eliud,  
<sup>15</sup> Eliud fathered Eleazar,  
Eleazar fathered Matthan,  
Matthan fathered Jacob,  
<sup>16</sup> and Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary,  
who gave birth to Jesus who is called the Christ.

<sup>38</sup> son of Enos, son of Seth,  
son of Adam, son of God.

<sup>17</sup> So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations; and from David until the exile to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the exile to Babylon until the Christ, fourteen generations.

#### GABRIEL PREDICTS JOHN'S BIRTH

LK 1:5-25

<sup>5</sup> In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest of Abijah's division named Zechariah. His wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. <sup>6</sup> Both were righteous in God's sight, living without blame according to all the commands and requirements of the Lord. <sup>7</sup> But they had no children because Elizabeth could not conceive, and both of them were well along in years.

<sup>8</sup> When his division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, <sup>9</sup> it happened that he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> At the hour of incense the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. <sup>11</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup> When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified and overcome with fear. <sup>13</sup> But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. <sup>14</sup> There will be joy and delight for you, and many will rejoice at his birth. <sup>15</sup> For he will be great in the sight of the Lord and will never drink wine or beer. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb. <sup>16</sup> He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup> And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to make ready for the Lord a prepared people."

<sup>18</sup> "How can I know this?" Zechariah asked the angel. "For I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years."

<sup>19</sup> The angel answered him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and tell you this good news. <sup>20</sup> Now listen. You will become silent and unable to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."

<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah, amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. <sup>22</sup> When he did come out, he could not speak to them. Then they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was making signs to them and remained speechless. <sup>23</sup> When the days of his ministry were completed, he went back home.

<sup>24</sup> After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived and kept herself in seclusion for five months. She said, <sup>25</sup> "The Lord has done this for me. He has looked with favor in these days to take away my disgrace among the people."

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,  
<sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was  
 Mary. <sup>28</sup> And the angel came to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you."  
<sup>29</sup> But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be.  
<sup>30</sup> Then the angel told her: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> Now  
 listen: You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great  
 and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his  
 father David. <sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will have no end."  
<sup>34</sup> Mary asked the angel, "How can this be, since I have not had sexual relations with a man?"  
<sup>35</sup> The angel replied to her: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most  
 High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.  
<sup>36</sup> And consider your relative Elizabeth — even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this  
 is the sixth month for her who was called childless. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God."  
<sup>38</sup> "I am the Lord's servant," said Mary. "May it be done to me according to your word." Then  
 the angel left her.

<sup>39</sup> In those days Mary set out and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judah <sup>40</sup> where she  
 entered Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the  
 baby leaped inside her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> Then she exclaimed with  
 a loud cry: "Blessed are you among women, and your child will be blessed! <sup>43</sup> How could this  
 happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> For you see, when the sound  
 of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped for joy inside me. <sup>45</sup> Blessed is she who has  
 believed that the Lord would fulfill what he has spoken to her!"  
<sup>46</sup> And Mary said:  
 My soul praises the greatness of the Lord,  
<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
<sup>48</sup> because he has looked with favor  
 on the humble condition of his servant.  
 Surely, from now on all generations  
 will call me blessed,  
<sup>49</sup> because the Mighty One  
 has done great things for me,  
 and his name is holy.  
<sup>50</sup> His mercy is from generation to generation  
 on those who fear him.  
<sup>51</sup> He has done a mighty deed with his arm;  
 he has scattered the proud  
 because of the thoughts of their hearts;  
<sup>52</sup> he has toppled the mighty from their thrones  
 and exalted the lowly.  
<sup>53</sup> He has satisfied the hungry with good things  
 and sent the rich away empty.

<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel,  
remembering his mercy  
<sup>55</sup> to Abraham and his descendants forever,  
just as he spoke to our ancestors.

<sup>56</sup> And Mary stayed with her about three months; then she returned to her home.

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#### THE BIRTH AND NAMING OF JOHN

LK 1:57-66

<sup>57</sup> Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she had a son. <sup>58</sup> Then her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her his great mercy, and they rejoiced with her.

<sup>59</sup> When they came to circumcise the child on the eighth day, they were going to name him Zechariah, after his father. <sup>60</sup> But his mother responded, “No. He will be called John.”

<sup>61</sup> Then they said to her, “None of your relatives has that name.” <sup>62</sup> So they motioned to his father to find out what he wanted him to be called. <sup>63</sup> He asked for a writing tablet and wrote: “His name is John.” And they were all amazed. <sup>64</sup> Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. <sup>65</sup> Fear came on all those who lived around them, and all these things were being talked about throughout the hill country of Judea. <sup>66</sup> All who heard about him took it to heart, saying, “What then will this child become?” For, indeed, the Lord’s hand was with him.

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#### ZECHARIAH’S PROPHECY

LK 1:67-80

<sup>67</sup> Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

<sup>68</sup> Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel,  
because he has visited  
and provided redemption for his people.  
<sup>69</sup> He has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
<sup>70</sup> just as he spoke by the mouth  
of his holy prophets in ancient times;  
<sup>71</sup> salvation from our enemies  
and from the hand of those who hate us.  
<sup>72</sup> He has dealt mercifully with our fathers  
and remembered his holy covenant —  
<sup>73</sup> the oath that he swore to our father Abraham.  
He has given us the privilege,  
<sup>74</sup> since we have been rescued  
from the hand of our enemies,  
to serve him without fear  
<sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness  
in his presence all our days.  
<sup>76</sup> And you, child, will be called  
a prophet of the Most High,  
for you will go before the Lord  
to prepare his ways,

<sup>77</sup> to give his people knowledge of salvation  
through the forgiveness of their sins.  
<sup>78</sup> Because of our God's merciful compassion,  
the dawn from on high will visit us  
<sup>79</sup> to shine on those who live in darkness  
and the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.

<sup>80</sup> The child grew up and became spiritually strong, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.

## THE BIRTH OF JESUS

MT 1:18-25

LK 2:1-7

In light of their respective introductions, one begins to develop an expectation for how a Gospel writer might narrate an event such as the birth of Jesus. Matthew seeks to show the cohesion between Jesus's birth and OT prophecy through his many "fulfillment" quotations (1:22-23). Luke, however, gives an

account of the events that triggered the pilgrimage of Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem as a means of placing Jesus's birth in the context of Greco-Roman history. Chronologically, Luke's account could fit seamlessly between Matthew 1:25 and 2:1.

<sup>18</sup> The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit.  
<sup>19</sup> So her husband Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.

<sup>20</sup> But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

<sup>22</sup> Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

<sup>23</sup> **See, the virgin will become pregnant  
and give birth to a son,  
and they will name him Immanuel,**

which is translated "God is with us."

<sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord's angel had commanded him. He married her  
<sup>25</sup> but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he named him Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered. <sup>2</sup> This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. <sup>3</sup> So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, <sup>5</sup> to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. <sup>6</sup> While they were there, the time came for her to give birth.

<sup>7</sup> Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

## THE SHEPHERDS AND THE ANGELS

LK 2:8-20

<sup>8</sup> In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. <sup>9</sup> Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: <sup>11</sup> Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger."

<sup>13</sup> Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

<sup>14</sup> Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and peace on earth to people he favors!

<sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go straight to Bethlehem and see what has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”

<sup>16</sup> They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> After seeing them, they reported the message they were told about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard, which were just as they had been told.

#### INFANT JESUS AT THE TEMPLE

LK 2:21-38

<sup>21</sup> When the eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus — the name given by the angel before he was conceived. <sup>22</sup> And when the days of their purification according to the law of Moses were finished, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (just as it is written in the law of the Lord, **Every firstborn male will be dedicated to the Lord**) <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice (according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, **a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons**).

<sup>25</sup> There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, looking forward to Israel’s consolation, and the Holy Spirit was on him. <sup>26</sup> It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he saw the Lord’s Messiah. <sup>27</sup> Guided by the Spirit, he entered the temple. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform for him what was customary under the law, <sup>28</sup> Simeon took him up in his arms, praised God, and said,

<sup>29</sup> Now, Master,  
you can dismiss your servant in peace,  
as you promised.  
<sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen your salvation.  
<sup>31</sup> You have prepared it  
in the presence of all peoples —  
<sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles  
and glory to your people Israel.

<sup>33</sup> His father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. <sup>34</sup> Then Simeon blessed them and told his mother Mary: “Indeed, this child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed — <sup>35</sup> and a sword will pierce your own soul — that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

<sup>36</sup> There was also a prophetess, Anna, a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well along in years, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, <sup>37</sup> and was a widow for eighty-four years. She did not leave the temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayers. <sup>38</sup> At that very moment, she came up and began to thank God and to speak about him to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

<sup>1</sup> After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of King Herod, wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup> saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star at its rising and have come to worship him.”

<sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this, he was deeply disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> So he assembled all the chief priests and scribes of the people and asked them where the Christ would be born.

<sup>5</sup> “In Bethlehem of Judea,” they told him, “because this is what was written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup> **And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah:  
Because out of you will come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.”**

<sup>7</sup> Then Herod secretly summoned the wise men and asked them the exact time the star appeared. <sup>8</sup> He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report back to me so that I too can go and worship him.”

<sup>9</sup> After hearing the king, they went on their way. And there it was — the star they had seen at its rising. It led them until it came and stopped above the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup> Entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and falling to their knees, they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another route.

<sup>13</sup> After they were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Get up! Take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. For Herod is about to search for the child to kill him.” <sup>14</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and escaped to Egypt. <sup>15</sup> He stayed there until Herod’s death, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: **Out of Egypt I called my Son.**

<sup>16</sup> Then Herod, when he realized that he had been outwitted by the wise men, flew into a rage. He gave orders to massacre all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, in keeping with the time he had learned from the wise men. <sup>17</sup> Then what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled:

<sup>18</sup> **A voice was heard in Ramah,  
weeping, and great mourning,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
and she refused to be consoled,  
because they are no more.**

<sup>19</sup> After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, <sup>20</sup> saying, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, because those who intended to kill the child are dead.” <sup>21</sup> So he got up, took the child and his mother, and entered the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup> But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned in a dream, he withdrew to the region of Galilee.

<sup>23</sup> Then he went and settled in a town called Nazareth to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

#### THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS

LK 2:39-52

<sup>39</sup> When they had completed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup> The boy grew up and became strong, filled with wisdom, and God's grace was on him.

<sup>41</sup> Every year his parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. <sup>42</sup> When he was twelve years old, they went up according to the custom of the festival. <sup>43</sup> After those days were over, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. <sup>44</sup> Assuming he was in the traveling party, they went a day's journey. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. <sup>45</sup> When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. <sup>46</sup> After three days, they found him in the temple sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup> And all those who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup> When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

<sup>49</sup> "Why were you searching for me?" he asked them. "Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?" <sup>50</sup> But they did not understand what he said to them.

<sup>51</sup> Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother kept all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup> And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.

#### JOHN THE BAPTIST PREPARES THE WAY

MT 3:1-12

MK 1:2-8

LK 3:1-18

JN 1:19-28

The account of John the Baptist is a good example of how the four Gospel writers showcase their unique literary nuances, relative to their purpose and style, without compromising the historical core of the event. In all four Gospels, John is described in relation to both the OT Scriptures and to Jesus. He is, on the one hand, the forerunner of the Messiah as foretold by Isaiah (Is 40:3). On the other hand, he must defer to the emerging mission of Jesus defined as baptism by "fire."

It is where the Gospel writers diverge, however, that proves most helpful in filling in some of the historical and theological gaps for the reader. Mark, as is often the case, gives only the essential details. But a comparison of Matthew

and Luke is quite insightful. Matthew singles out the Pharisees and Sadducees as the central recipients of Jesus's scathing rebuke. These religious leaders will emerge as the antagonists as his story unfolds. Luke, though, applies Jesus's rebuke more broadly to the "multitude." Moreover, by highlighting John's reply to the repeated question, "What then should we do?" from various groups, Luke shows a number of his own social concerns. John's account has some affinities with Matthew in how he singles out the religious officials who will play a similar antagonistic role in his Gospel. Yet, in John, the discussion of the Baptist's identity is a response to the badgering inquisition of the religious leaders.

<sup>1</sup> In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea <sup>2</sup> and saying, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" <sup>3</sup> For he is the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, who said:

**A voice of one crying out  
in the wilderness:  
Prepare the way for the Lord;  
make his paths straight!**

<sup>1</sup> In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, while Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, <sup>2</sup> during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, God's word came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> He went into all the vicinity of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of

<sup>19</sup> This was John's testimony when the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, "Who are you?"

<sup>20</sup> He didn't deny it but confessed: "I am not the Messiah."

<sup>21</sup> "What then?" they asked him. "Are you Elijah?"

"I am not," he said.

"Are you the Prophet?"

<sup>4</sup> Now John had a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup> Then people from Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were going out to him, <sup>6</sup> and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. <sup>7</sup> When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup> Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance. <sup>9</sup> And don’t presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones. <sup>10</sup> The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>11</sup> “I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove his sandals. He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>12</sup> His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn. But the chaff he will burn with fire that never goes out.”

<sup>2</sup> As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

**See, I am sending  
my messenger ahead  
of you;  
he will prepare your way.  
<sup>3</sup> A voice of one crying out  
in the wilderness:  
Prepare the way  
for the Lord;  
make his paths straight!**

<sup>4</sup> John came baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup> John wore a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.

<sup>7</sup> He proclaimed, “One who is more powerful than I am is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. <sup>8</sup> I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

repentance for the forgiveness of sins, <sup>4</sup> as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah: **A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight!** <sup>5</sup> **Every valley will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be made low; the crooked will become straight, the rough ways smooth, and everyone will see the salvation of God.**

<sup>7</sup> He then said to the crowds who came out to be baptized by him, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? <sup>8</sup> Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance. And don’t start saying to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones. <sup>9</sup> The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” <sup>10</sup> “What then should we do?” the crowds were asking him. <sup>11</sup> He replied to them, “The one who has two shirts must share with someone who has none, and the one who has food must do the same.” <sup>12</sup> Tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they asked him, “Teacher, what should we do?” <sup>13</sup> He told them, “Don’t collect any more than what you have been authorized.” <sup>14</sup> Some soldiers also questioned him, “What should we do?” He said to them, “Don’t take money from anyone by force or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.” <sup>15</sup> Now the people were waiting expectantly, and all of them were questioning in their hearts whether John might be the Messiah. <sup>16</sup> John answered them all, “I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I am is coming. I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing shovel is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with fire that never goes out.” <sup>18</sup> Then, along with many other exhortations, he proclaimed good news to the people.

“No,” he answered.

<sup>22</sup> “Who are you, then?” they asked. “We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What can you tell us about yourself?”

<sup>23</sup> He said, “I am a **voice of one crying out in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord** — just as Isaiah the prophet said.”

<sup>24</sup> Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. <sup>25</sup> So they asked him, “Why then do you baptize if you aren’t the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Prophet?”

<sup>26</sup> “I baptize with water,” John answered them. “Someone stands among you, but you don’t know him. <sup>27</sup> He is the one coming after me, whose sandal strap I’m not worthy to untie.” <sup>28</sup> All this happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

There is little divergence among the Gospel writers regarding Jesus's baptism, especially in the Synoptic Gospels (i.e., Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and their unanimous testimony about the voice from heaven that affirms Jesus as "my beloved Son." Nevertheless, some peculiarities warrant comment. Matthew, for example, highlights the important shift from John's role to Jesus's mission, a transition that will "fulfill all righteousness." This is the first of seven

distinctive uses of the term "righteousness" in Matthew that highlights the author's burden to show Jesus's conformity to a moral norm, namely the Jewish law. John's account of Jesus's baptism is also unique, yet it fits his primary intent to "testify" to the truthfulness of Jesus's identity, a governing purpose made explicit at the end of his Gospel (cf. 21:24).

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> But John tried to stop him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?"

<sup>15</sup> Jesus answered him, "Allow it for now, because this is the way for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then John allowed him to be baptized.

<sup>16</sup> When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him.

<sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased."

<sup>9</sup> In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. <sup>10</sup> As soon as he came up out of the water, he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased."

<sup>21</sup> When all the people were baptized, Jesus also was baptized. As he was praying, heaven opened, <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended on him in a physical appearance like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased."

<sup>29</sup> The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Here is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup> This is the one I told you about: 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me, because he existed before me.' <sup>31</sup> I didn't know him, but I came baptizing with water so he might be revealed to Israel." <sup>32</sup> And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and he rested on him. <sup>33</sup> I didn't know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The one you see the Spirit descending and resting on — he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>34</sup> I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."

## THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

MT 4:1-11

MK 1:12-13

LK 4:1-13

Mark's account of the temptation of Jesus offers, once again, only the bare essentials of the event. Matthew and Luke, however, are more expansive. A comparison of the two reveals a discrepancy related to the order of the three temptations. The last two temptations are reversed: Matthew = bread → temple → mountain; Luke = bread → mountain → temple. The simplest explanation is that Matthew's order is chronological and Luke's is thematic. As such, Luke preferred to end his account with the temple scene given the significance of the temple for his unfolding story of Jesus's mission. Yet

the acceptability of this explanation rests upon one's ability to distinguish between strict chronology and historicity. In other words, the historical accuracy of an account is not necessarily compromised if the events are presented in a different chronological order. Both authors, it should be noted, are driven primarily by thematic concerns. The original chronology, it seems, fits Matthew's literary and theological purposes. Yet Luke deviates from strict chronology to make a theological point, but he retains the historical core of the event.

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> Then the tempter approached

<sup>12</sup> Immediately the Spirit drove him into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup> He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels were serving him.

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus left the Jordan, full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness <sup>2</sup> for forty days to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when

him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

<sup>4</sup> He answered, “It is written: **Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.**”

<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city, had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup> and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written:

**He will give his angels orders concerning you,  
and they will support you with their hands  
so that you will not strike  
your foot against a stone.”**

<sup>7</sup> Jesus told him, “It is also written: **Do not test the Lord your God.**”

<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. <sup>9</sup> And he said to him, “I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me.”

<sup>10</sup> Then Jesus told him, “Go away, Satan! For it is written: **Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.**”

<sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and angels came and began to serve him.

they were over, he was hungry. <sup>3</sup> The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”

<sup>4</sup> But Jesus answered him, “It is written: **Man must not live on bread alone.**”

<sup>5</sup> So he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. <sup>6</sup> The devil said to him, “I will give you their splendor and all this authority, because it has been given over to me, and I can give it to anyone I want. <sup>7</sup> If you, then, will worship me, all will be yours.”

<sup>8</sup> And Jesus answered him, “It is written: **Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.**”

<sup>9</sup> So he took him to Jerusalem, had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. <sup>10</sup> For it is written:

**He will give his angels orders concerning you,  
to protect you, <sup>11</sup> and  
they will support you with their hands,  
so that you will not strike  
your foot against a stone.”**

<sup>12</sup> And Jesus answered him, “It is said: **Do not test the Lord your God.**”

<sup>13</sup> After the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.